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Fashion in Multiple Chinas: Chinese Styles in the
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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chinapersonpectives/9557>

DOI: 10.4000/chinapersonpectives.9557

ISSN: 1996-4617

Publisher

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2019

Number of pages: 17-72

ISSN: 2070-3449

Electronic reference

Sabine Chrétien-Ichikawa, « LING, Wessie, and Simona SEGRE-REINACH. 2018. Fashion in Multiple Chinas: Chinese Styles in the Transglobal Landscape. London: I.B. Tauris. », *China Perspectives* [Online], 2019-3 | 2019, Online since 01 September 2019, connection on 19 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinapersonpectives/9557> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinapersonpectives.9557>

This text was automatically generated on 19 December 2020.

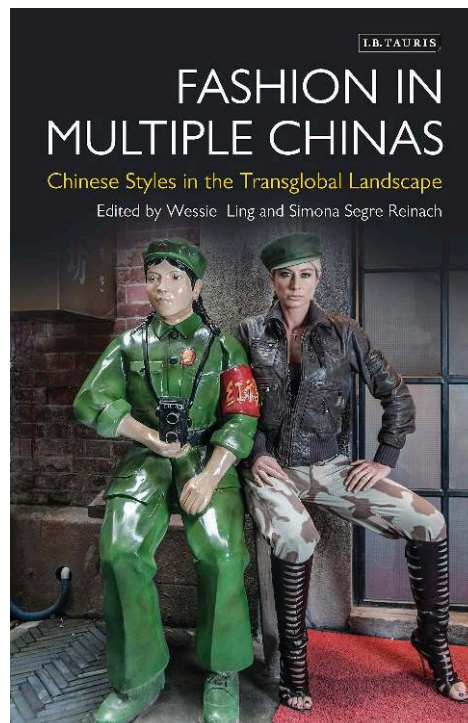
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Book review

Sabine Chrétien-Ichikawa

- 1 *Fashion in Multiple Chinas: Chinese Styles in the Transglobal Landscape* provides knowledgeable readers and non-specialists alike with an overview of the factors that contributed to the emergence of Chinese fashion. This analysis of the political, economic, and socio-cultural environment in which the garment industry developed allows contextualisation of the complexity and the potential of Chinese fashion.
- 2 The editors, Wessie Ling and Simona Segre-Reinach, gathered eleven among the most renowned specialists regarding Chinese fashion. These researchers in anthropology, history, economy, communication, and design, as well as artists and museum curators, all aim at questioning and challenging a Euro-centred approach that limits the



understanding of Chinese fashion – a nascent system that does not fit neatly into Western theoretical frameworks. The factors enabling the emergence of contemporary Chinese fashion come from within and outside of mainland China. The authors do not attempt to define a collective Chinese identity, but rather refer to multiple sources and expressions of identity in China and in Asia. An analysis of the value chain at different levels, from creation to production and distribution, gives a wide-angle perspective on these processes. This book confirms the importance of transdisciplinarity in fashion studies to examine the political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of the phenomenon.

- 3 The book's first part traces the birth and evolution of the fashion industry in mainland China, and the obstacles that were overcome to develop local creativity. In Chapter 1, Ling and Segre Reinach remind us that the production of contemporary Chinese fashion has not yet attracted much scholarly investigation. Making sense of its transnational and local dimensions, and defining its identity, modernity, and culture, remains difficult, while a linear approach is patently impossible. The division between the concepts of material and symbolic fashion, common among Western scholars, does not apply directly to a country that was mainly producing cheap garments. In Chapter 2, Antonia Finnane and Peidong Sun focus on the history of Chinese fashion production within its political, economic, and cultural contexts. We understand that Chinese fashion stems from a history of textile production that not only enabled rapid industrial development, but also ignored local market demand. The evolution of relations with other nations directly impacted fashion, with the Mao jacket as an example. Furthermore, the influence of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Albania on Chinese society (through films, media, and musical comedies) demonstrates how ideologies shape fashion. In Chapter 3, Jianhua Zhao makes a clear distinction between clothing and fashion, and explains the factors leading the Chinese fashion industry to emerge: economic reforms, government incentives, and cultural influences from East Asia. The market is divided into three segments (fast fashion, ready-to-wear, and high fashion), illustrated respectively by the cases of Metersbonwe, Zuczug, and Lanyu. The three companies use foreign business models, designers, fabrics, and distribution channels that are not unique to China. Juanjuan Wu, Yue Hu, Lei Xu, and Marilyn R. DeLong in Chapter 4 examine the retail environment of Chinese fashion designers (merchandising, retail store, service, and promotion) thanks to a theoretical framework provided by Davies and Ward.¹ The authors decipher local status symbols, new fashions, and forms and meanings relevant to Chinese consumers in narrow social circles. This chapter also dives into the futuristic vision of 15 young designers and shows that the role of designers' stores and collective design is instrumental to the emergence of a fashion movement. Policies of fashion development are scrutinised in Chapter 5 by Xin Gu through the angle of creative economy and government incentives. The author demonstrates that measures tend to evaluate designers mainly from their success on the market. They underline the lack of social networks between creative people, as well as mediaries between the cultural and business worlds, production, and distribution points. Creative clusters may not be suited to SMEs. The author concludes that the eco-system is still immature, and that the government does not have the ability to evaluate and promote creative industries.
- 4 The book's second part is dedicated to fashion trends in the region, discussing their similarities and differences vis à vis mainland China. In Chapter 6, editor Wessie Ling presents the role of Hong Kong in the development of mainland fashion. She explains

the process of industrialisation and the reasons why major local star designers have not emerged. One of the reasons given is that the priority was commercial and financial above all. The other was serving the development of mainland China, and co-creation. In Chapter 7, Anne Peirson-Smith analyses the dissemination of the cosplay movement over Asia (Hong Kong, South East Asia, China) stemming from Japan. The similarities and differences of acceptance and usage of this pop culture movement are contextualised in their socio-cultural and local environments. To avoid undue scrutiny, cosplay activities in China favour characters referencing Chinese myths and legends, rather than Japanese manga.

- 5 The book's third section highlights exchanges between China and the West. In Chapter 8, May Khuen-Chung depicts the phenomenon of hybrid fashion born in the cosmopolitan city of Singapore in the 1950s. The author curated an exhibition on this topic in 2012, and traces the formal evolution of the local attire (*cheongsam*) as it has incorporated Western elements in the midst of social change and women's emancipation. Acknowledging Chinese designers' lack of international recognition, Hazel Clark in Chapter 9 distinguishes those working in mainland China from those based in Western countries. Their connection with their original culture and their heritage influences how they are perceived in China and overseas. The author studies the relationship between heritage and national identity among two generations of designers. Editor Simona Segre-Reinach in Chapter 10 explores the process of globalisation through the story of the Italian designer Romeo Gigli. A legendary designer of the late 1980s, Gigli offers a unique illustration of how a Western brand and style can survive and be relaunched thanks to Chinese partners. As the creative director of a China-based brand, he epitomises globalised fashion and creates a bridge between East and West through creation and production.
- 6 Throughout the book, the limitations of a Euro-centred perspective on the nascent Chinese fashion becomes obvious, and the concept of "Chineseness" emerges as an effective antidote to this blind spot. This could constitute a new area of inquiry for future research, especially when related to soft power. The reader would have expected a conclusion in which the editors would have identified further fields of inquiry such as: (1) the increasing impact of social media on fashion, (2) following and even anticipating the role of young Millennials and Generation Z, and (3) auditing successful cases of sustainable fashion and CSR (corporate social responsibility) in terms of production and consumption of fashion. This book reveals interesting facets of Chinese fashion, and this endeavour should be expanded to explore more contemporary, local, and deeper issues in Chinese fashion that are likely to influence global fashion as China's role increases worldwide.

NOTES

1. Barry J. Davies and Philippa Ward. 2005. "Exploring the connections between visual merchandising and retail branding: An application of facet theory," *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 33(7): 505-13.
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